

Archives Advice No. 5

Records Classification

Considerations for Government Officials

What does it mean?

A record classification is a general classification used to describe how long a record is maintained, or in other words, its retention period. Knowing how long to retain a record is important, not only for agency compliance with the Georgia Records Act, but also for evaluating the need to reformat records and the cost considerations for preserving records. There are four classifications of records:

- Transitory
- Temporary – Short Term
- Temporary – Long Term
- Permanent

Transitory Records

Transitory records are temporary records that do not meet the requirements for longer retention imposed by the Georgia Records Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-94 (1)). Transitory records are created for short-term internal purposes and should be disposed of once that purpose has been met. Such materials include (but are not limited to): duplicate record copies that do not require official action, so long as the creating office maintains the original record for the period required; telephone call-back messages; drafts of ordinary documents not needed for their evidential value; copies of material sent for information purposes but not needed by the receiving office for future business; and internal communications about department social activities.

In addition, materials received by an agency that require no action and do not document government activities, such as catalogs, trade journals, and other publications are considered transitory records. Stocks of blank stationary and blank forms that are not subject to audit and have become obsolete may also be disposed of as transitory.

Temporary Short-Term

Temporary records are those records that once created, must be retained for a period of time before being destroyed. They are ideal for off site storage (if in paper format) and for reformatting in many cases, often in digital form.

Short-term records meet the requirements established by the Georgia Records Act and must be retained for a minimum retention period. This period is usually connected to an audit requirement, federal regulation, or statute of limitations but equally, may be related to the period of time information is needed to conduct future business. Record retentions of up to fifteen years are considered to be short-term.



GEORGIA ARCHIVES

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Temporary Long-Term

Like short-term records, these are also temporary and once created, must be retained for a period of time before being destroyed. They also are ideal for off site storage (if in paper format) and should be included in reformatting discussions. These records are often good candidates for microfilming.

Long-term records meet the requirements established by the Georgia Records Act and must be retained for a minimum retention period. This period is usually connected to a federal regulation, or statute of limitations but equally, may be related to the period of time information is needed to conduct future business. Long-term records are retained for fifteen years or longer but are not considered permanent records.

Permanent

Permanent records are those documents created or received and accumulated by an agency in the course of conducting business that have been selected (by the Georgia Archives) for preservation because of continuing research and historical value. Many of these records will be acquired and preserved by the Georgia Archives. Other records will remain in the custody of the agency.

Permanent records are often good candidates for microfilm reformatting. The policy of the Georgia Archives is that *no record with a retention period of more than 15 years may be retained solely in electronic form.*

How does this help me manage my records?

Managing records involves implementing practices to provide protection, preservation, and access as appropriate to the value and life span of the records and the needs and resources of the organization. To make the best decisions for the agency's resources and its records, the agency must be aware of the retention of its records and the cost associated with that retention.

The records classification categories can assist in communicating this awareness. As the retention of a record increases from transitory to permanent, the costs associated with its retention and reformatting increase. Decisions to maintain a record longer than the minimum required retention period stated on the agency records retention schedules or to reformat (and maintain) records into a micro or digital format must include the consideration of the length of time a record will be maintained.

Consider the following statements relating classification and the decision to maintain records:

- Return on investment (ROI) for microfilm averages about 15 years therefore, short-term and transitory records are not suited (in most cases) for microfilm reformatting.
- Because of the need to migrate and convert digital records, the maintenance of long-term records in a digital format should be considered carefully and with a hard look at the budgetary demands such maintenance will require.
- Transitory records because of their short life span should be removed from computer systems and filing cabinets quickly so as not to take up valuable storage space. Also, they should never be included in a reformatting project.

If you need further assistance, please call the Georgia Archives at (678) 364-3790.